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AUTHOR Makkawi, Ibrahim A.
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on a unique group of Palestinian women--those who live and attend college in Israel. The paper explores the developmental and social-psychological processes leading to gender and national identity achievement among female Palestinian student activists in the Israeli universities and the dialectical relationship between these two identities. The paper points out that to speak about the experiences of Palestinian women students in Israel, aside from the historical depth of the Palestinian Women's Movement (PWM) and its contribution to gender awareness among Palestinian women activists, simplifies a series of complex issues. The paper presents a brief survey of the four historical phases of the PWM from before 1948 until today, with emphasis on the interaction between the national struggle and the women's struggle within it. It presents and describes a study conducted with Palestinian student activists in Israel and discusses the findings pertaining to the female participants of the study. (Contains a 32-item bibliography.) (BT)

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GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT AMONG PALESTINIAN WOMEN STUDENT ACTIVISTS IN ISRAEL

Ibrahim A. Makkawi

E-mail:Imakkawi@kent.edu
Kent State University
Department of Educational Psychology

SO 030 674

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Introduction

I once again had to face the problem of being a Palestinian Arab woman. My sisters in the West speak of two kinds of oppression: class and sexual. I had to face four kinds of oppression: national, social (the weight of traditions and habits), class and sexual.

Leila Khaled

Any attempt to understand the Palestinian Women's Movement (PWM) without viewing it within the context of the general Palestinian National Movement (PNM), or discuss the latter without giving a special attention to the unique role played by Palestinian women and their organizations, in mobilizing and sustaining the struggle is incomplete and misleading. Feminism and nationalism in Third World national movements are intertwined and clearly influence each other (Abdo, 1994). The struggle of Palestinian women is an illustrative example of this phenomenon.

Despite the fact that Palestinian women have always been active in the national movement, their participation became crucial and most evident since the outbreak of the Palestinian *Intifada* in 1987. From the beginning, Palestinian women have played the key role in organizing and carrying out the *Intifada.* According to Sayigh (1989), "after decades of media-starvation, Palestinians are suddenly bombarded by journalists, film-makers, researchers, novelists, conference-conveners, all interested in one topic: Palestinian women" (p. 465). It is this turning point that made Palestinian women voices advocating a combination of feminist and nationalist agendas finally be heard.

This paper focuses on a unique group of Palestinian women--those who live and go to college in Israel. The purpose of this paper is to explore the developmental and social-psychological processes leading to gender and national identity achievement among Palestinian women student activists in the Israeli universities and the dialectical relationship between these two identities. However, to speak about the experiences of Palestinian women students in Israel aside from the historical depth of the PWM and its contribution to gender awareness among Palestinian women activists is simplifying.

Historically, the development of the PWM can be divided into four different periods corresponding to the general evolution of the PNM. First, the period before 1948 during the struggle against the British mandate and Zionist immigration to Palestine. Second, since the establishment of Israel in 1948 until the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. Third, the period between 1967 and the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987. Finally, from the beginning of the Intifada to the present.

A brief survey of the above mentioned phases of the PWM with emphasis on the interaction between the national struggle and the women's struggle within it is in order. Next, the study conducted with Palestinian student activists in Israel will be described and the findings pertaining to the women participants of the study will be discussed.

Before 1948

The Arab Higher Committee (AHC), created in 1936, was the only form of organized Palestinian leadership during the British Mandate (1917-1948) and included only men in its ranks. The majority of the AHC members came from the country's major families and had attended institutions of higher learning (Nashif, 1977). Despite the educational background of its members, this leadership was more representative of, and loyal to its familial interests rather than committing itself to a revolutionary transformation of the Palestinian society.

Women participation in the public sphere was not possible unless it was part of the national struggle, and even then social issues that determined the status of women in society were not on the agenda. Kuttab (1993), attributes the precedence of the national cause over the feminist in the Palestinian women's political involvement during that time

to the conservative nature of the Palestinian society. She argues that "it should be obvious that Palestinian women who lived in a traditional environment governed by patriarchal structures and ideologies would not have been able to enter the public male sphere if it were not for the national struggle" (p. 71).

Hiltermann (1991), compares the activities of Palestinian women during the Mandate to their sisters in the other Arab countries. He writes,

> Whereas in the Arab countries, such as Egypt and Tunisia, early women's organizations fought for such typical sociopolitical demands as the abolition of polygamy and summary divorce, and for the right to vote, in Palestine women demanded the Balfour Declaration be revoked, that Jewish immigration to Palestine be restricted, and that Palestinian prisoners receive better treatment (p.--).

This is not to suggest that Palestinian women did not suffer from the same issues confronting other Arab women. But the challenges facing the Palestinian society at that time demanded the participation of all segments of the population, which required putting aside internal cleavages. However, there has always been a pressing need for the mobilization of the whole Palestinian community including women. Under these circumstances, the dilemma of what comes first, the national or the social, has become sharpened throughout the different phases of the Palestinians' history.

Palestinian women's organizations at that time reflected the political and social structure of the Palestinian society at large. The leadership of the women's associations consisted of women from the upper class; usually relatives of the national male leadership. Most of their activities were limited to charitable and humanitarian domains which was consistent with the society's class structure and reflected a picture of "the rich helping the poor." Political involvement of the upper class Palestinian women in the national cause was an extension of the dominant leadership. Sex segregation at that time, was another factor behind their separate organization, and prevented them from joining the existing political parties which were mainly composed of men. Jad (1990), illustrates the organized attempt by the Palestinian women to enter the political struggle:

> The first women's conference was held in Jerusalem in 1929; it was chaired by the wife of the Arab executive committee head, Musa Hatem al-Husaini. More than 200 women attended, most of them wives and relatives of political leaders or notables, or rich women. The resolutions of the conference were similar to those of the Arab executive committee and included the rejection of the Balfour declaration and Jewish immigration (p. 127).

The conference resulted in the formation of the Arab Women's Committee (AWC) which reflected the above mentioned upper class and clan based leadership of the Palestinian society. Sayigh (1989), suggests that further research is needed in order to determine whether or not the AWC had "simply carried out actions handed down to it by the national leadership?" (p. 155). However, the failure of the AWC to incorporate rural and poor urban women in its ranks was just another indication of its strong reliance on the national leadership and its class interests. Rural women in the countryside participated in the national struggle in a completely different way. They smuggled arms, food and medical supplies onto the battlefields, helped hide fugitives and donated their jewelry to buy arms (Jad, 1990).

1948 - 1967: The quiescent period

The Palestinians refer to the war of 1948 and the establishment of Israel as *al-Nakbah*, or the disaster. It resulted in the fragmentation of their society and the fading of most of their sociopolitical institutions. They now became scattered into four different communities under very different social, political and economic conditions. Within Israel, the remaining 160,000 Palestinians were overnight transformed from a majority in their own country to a minority who was forced to live, work and study in an alien system. The West Bank was annexed by Jordan and Gaza Strip became administered by the Egyptian military. The rest of the Palestinians became refugees in the neighboring Arab countries, mainly Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The uprooting led to a series of

dramatic changes in women's lives that included a weakening of the power of the family as a social, economic and political unit.

Palestinian political work was not tolerated under the Jordanian rule over the West Bank. The word "Palestinian" in most of the previously existing organizations such as students, workers and women was replaced by "Jordanian." Jad (1990), accounts that prior to Jordan's annexation of the West Bank in 1950, "six [women] charitable associations were established to meet the needs of an expelled and destroyed nation" (p. 127). Palestinian women organizations in West Bank were initially incorporated into the Jordanian's; a situation that continued until the appearance of the PLO when the Palestinians began to assert their own national identity. Although Palestinian women were very active during this period on the West Bank, not much is known about their activities for lack of separate documentation from the Jordanian institutions.

The situation of the Palestinian women in Gaza was not encouraging either. The influx of huge numbers of refugees from the territories occupied by Israel in 1948, made the density of population in the tiny Strip one of the highest in the world. In the words of Jad (1990),

> Women's status in the Gaza Strip during the 1949-67 period was similar to that of women under Jordanian rule in terms of their bad economic situation and men's immigration. The area was at that time under Egyptian military rule, non-democratic, though nationalist in nature. Here too, then, women were the backbone of refugee camp life (p. 128).

Class differences did not vanish with the mass exodus of the Palestinians from their homeland in 1948, on the contrary, class differences became more acute in exile. According to Peteet (1991), "the more salient division was rural-urban, a social division that survived the exodus of 1948, as peasants settled into refugee camps and urbanites into towns and cities" (p. --)

No sign of independent Palestinian resistance was evident until the formation of the PLO in 1964. The role previously played by the women's organizations had become more essential and had expanded under the new conditions. Peteet (1991), states that "the tradition of women organizing around charitable issues continued but was eventually to be eclipsed by the entry of peasant, now camp women and women of an emergent middle class into a political arena previously dominated by men" (p.--) Women's charitable organizations mushroomed in the camps in order to meet the pressing demands of survival in the new situation. Although this might be views as an extension of their domestic roles as care givers and protection providers to those in need, the women carried on a substantial role of substituting for the state services.

1967-1987: Women in the PLO

Three major resistance factions formed the PLO in 1964: Fatah, the largest and most dominant, with a non-ideological nationalism, which appealed to a wide variety of Palestinians, The Popular Front For the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a Marxist-Leninist organization committed to armed struggle and revolutionary transformation throughout the Arab world and The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), also a Marxist-Leninist party but more aligned to the general policy of the previous Soviet Union. Other smaller factions, individuals and grassroots organizations such as the students, workers and women were represented in the PLO. Palestinian women have been active in the PLO, both as members of their respective factions and through the General Palestinian Women's Union (GPWU).

Not too long after the establishment of the PLO in 1964, the Palestinian society had absorbed another blow by Israel. The 1967 war resulted in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the creation of new wave of refugees. The Israeli aggression and conquest in 1967 led to a great wave of popular support for the Palestinian struggle throughout the region. On the other hand, the growth of the Palestinian organizations in Jordan was undermining the dictatorial rule of King Hussein. In September, 1970 -

known to the Palestinian people as Black September - Hussein's army launched an all out attack on the refugee camps in Amman. The weeks that followed saw a bloodshed against Palestinians across the country as the Jordanian army seized control of Palestinian community and refugee camps. Surviving Palestinian fighters were subsequently driven out of Jordan. With the crushing of the Palestinian upsurge in Jordan, Lebanon which had the second largest concentration of Palestinian refugees, was now the PLO's most important base of operation.

Palestinian women in Lebanon had played an indispensable role in both the preservation of the refugees community in exile and the armed struggle led by the PLO. Their major contribution to the struggle was made through the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), which has officially represented Palestinian women in the PLO since 1965 (Kawar, 1993). The GUPW membership reflected the size and power of the different factions within the PLO. Its membership and structure, supposedly unites women from all the PLO factions (Peteet, 1991). However, in reality these women advocate and represent the agendas of their respective political groups rather than their common issues as women. Predictably, women members affiliated with Fatah dominated the Union, and consequently, subdued the union to the male dominated leadership of the PLO, which was not only ideologically obscure but also conservative on social issues regarding women rights and status in society. Kawar (1993), attempts to explain Fatah's failure to formalize a clear policy of social change and incorporation of women:

> The Women's Union, which had symbolically opposed [the Palestinian society's] traditional outlook, supported the mobility of women by floating the slogan "Land before Honor". However, the Palestinian Movement - especially Fatah - did not want to rock the social structure with an accelerated, social change ideology that might be divisive and might drain its limited political and financial resources (p. 57).

Be it limited resources, or the conservative political outlook of the Palestinian leadership, issues of women liberation have been repeatedly compromised in the name of the national struggle as if the two can never be integrated. Fatah women members of the PLO, according to Sayigh (1989), "many of whom had been militant in Jordan, and who were generally more progressive on the 'woman issue', were too divided among themselves to bring pressure on their [male dominated] leadership" (p. 160). However discouraging this picture to Palestinian women in the PLO might be, some hope can be found in the programs of the more socially progressive factions. Sayigh (1989), argues that "there are certainly some differences between the resistance groups: the Marxist groups in general and the PFLP in particular have given importance to women's liberation, and have occasionally come out with 'advanced positions' or condemnation of existing practices." In another place, Sayigh (1989a), accounts that "PFLP leader George Habash's two pamphlets [*On the Liberation of Women & The Revolution and the Liberation of Women Issue*] put women's liberation on the same footing as class and national liberation" (p. 466).

The organizational structure of the PLO and the process of political leadership and decision making, is too complicated to be discussed and analyzed in the limited context of this paper. Briefly, it consists of the Palestine National Council (PNC), which is the legislative authority and includes 301 members from different factions, the Executive Committee which resembles a government in exile and the Central Council which is an intermediary advisory organ. The division of the PNC seats is based on a rough estimation of the political power of each faction or group rather than direct elections. Fatah, dominates the PNC and the Executive Committee and Yasir Arafat has assumed power in the PLO since 1965. This picture is essential in order to understand the power of Palestinian women within the PLO and their impact on the process of decision making.

There has never been a woman member of the Executive Committee, despite the fact that women form 10% of the PNC members (Awad, 1991). Leila Khaled, a PNC and PFLP member told Al-Hadaf (1991), that

> In some of the factions women have reached leadership positions, however after 25 years of

> revolution, the percentages are still low. These factions include women issues in their programs due to their progressive outlook. Therefore, they are required more than others to advocate the incorporation of women with capacities into leadership positions (p. 17).

What Leila Khaled refers to here is the power of women within their respective faction, especially the leftist ones. But these factions themselves lack impact on the process of decision making within the PLO which has been under a rather conservative leadership of Yasir Arafat for more than three decades.

Mobilizing Palestinian women to the national movement during the period of 1970-1982 in Lebanon was not isolated from the situation of war. Not only their participation in the resistance was affected by the war itself, but also their daily life in the camps was continuously under war related stress. Class differences which the Palestinians carried with them to exile, and the conservative outlook of the camp community were crucial in women's organizing. Kawar (1993), explains how the camp women are caught between the revolution and the patriarchal society,

> Organizers, who are mainly younger women from the urban middle-class, found first steps very trying. They learned of the complexity of the traditional women's lives and about how their interests were fundamentally and intricately bound to those of family. To reach women required recognizing their group interest, not as individuals or as an economic class, but as members of their primary social unit (p. 58).

What may be gathered from this experience, indicates that from the outset the revolution had pursued compromise and coexistence with the patriarchal system rather than challenging it with social transformation and change. Woman's participation at this stage required the blessing and approval of her father or husband. Because of the economic difficulties among the camp community, women recruitment was geared towards this domain which also had more chances of support by the men in the family. According to Kawar (1993), "programs to engage women [included] literacy classes, sewing, embroidering, and beauty salon workshops [which] formed the sort of traditional activities that were attractive because they increased opportunity for employment" (p.58).

On June 6, 1982, Israel launched an all out invasion of Lebanon. The Israeli rulers wanted to destroy the PLO, including capturing or killing its top leaders and eliminate the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon. The distraction of the PLO, the Israeli ruler calculated, would deal a big blow to the morale of the Palestinians and consolidate Israeli rule over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On August 30, nine thousand PLO fighters, including their leadership were evacuated from Beirut. The unarmed 2000 victims in the infamous massacres of Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, following the evacuation of the Palestinian fighters were mainly women and children. Having lost the base for their revolution in Lebanon, the Palestinians brought the revolution home, to the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

Roots of the Intifada: Women in the West Bank

The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 created major structural changes in the Palestinian society. Following massive land confiscation, the peasant class was transformed into a proletarian work-force in the Israeli market. While the entire population of the West Bank and Gaza have been exploited by the Israeli capitalist system, women had suffered a double burden because of the way the Israeli occupying system made use of the Palestinian patriarchal structure to further exploit their work force. Sex segregation and other social restrictions imposed on Palestinian women were used by their employer for direct exploitation. According to Haj (1992),

> They can restrict the mobility of female workers, guaranteeing their abstention from trade union activity and controlling the workers' arrival and departure times, thus enabling employers to prolong working hours. There are reports of women working up to fourteen hours a day without overtime pay (p. 767).

During the period from 1948-1967, while Jordan controlled the West Bank and

Egypt the Gaza Strip, women's activities typically took place within the framework of already existing religious institutions, and were mostly charitable in nature (Hiltermann, 1991). Women's charitable organizations played a significant role by filling the gap in public services that both the Jordanian government later the Israeli military rule since 1967 failed to supply. Almost a decade ago, 38 such associations were active on the West Bank alone, offering basic health care, nurseries, orphanages, relief and income-generating projects for needy families (Sayigh,1989). The most prominent of these associations are *Inash al-Usra* (The Family Rehabilitation Society) of Al-Bireh and the Arab Women's Union of Bethlehem. Both of these organizations according to Sayigh (1989), "remained urban-based, directed by urban women, incorporating women of other classes as clients rather than full members" (p. 574). Women leaders of these organizations tend to be older and members of the upper class.

Most interesting in the Palestinian women's movement is the political disparity between the older and younger generations. While both generations are equally eager to end the Israeli occupation, they sharply differ regarding the role and status of women in the Palestinian society. According to Haj (1992), older women's reluctance to commit themselves to radical social change stems from their relatively influential status in the traditional patriarchal system. She writes,

> The entry of the older generation of activists into the political struggle is a natural extension of their relatively powerful status as mothers within the extended family household, earned through seniority and bearing sons. Since they are part of the power structure, their political mobilization does not lead them to question patriarchal relations or the prevailing forms of gender inequalities. Simply put, they have an investment in protecting patriarchal relations. (p. 775)

Despite the magnificent role played by these charity organizations, in defying the occupation authorities, and the abundant services they provided to women in need, their older women leaders continuously refrained from addressing issues of women liberation. The famous statement of Um Khalil, the founder of *Inash al-Usra* regarding women's issues has been repeatedly quoted by researchers. She has said, that "when a girl begins to earn money she may begin to impose conditions on her family. We don't encourage such a spirit in our girls. To open the door too wide would cause a bad reaction" (Haj, 1992 p. 776). The problem with women leaders such as Um Khalil is not only that she is conservative on the question of women and feminism, but that associations like here's were the only organizational frameworks available to women in the West Bank and Gaza until the late 1970s.

Notwithstanding their role in preserving the Palestinian heritage and providing care for a large sector of women, the charitable organizations did not enhance the capacities of the women they served and help to become more involved in society and affect social change. A pressing need for women organizations to mobilize women as a political force and address their social problems as women became evident in the late 1970. In the words of Hiltermann (1991),

> A new generation of [women] activists, prompted by pressing social needs and encouraged by the political leadership, therefore looked for frameworks in the 1970s that would accommodate their interests. When they found none, they set up their own (p.--).

Four Women's Working Committees (WWC) have emerged in the West Bank and Gaza since 1978. The WWCs were different from the charitable associations in their structure and political ideology. They recruited members among all sectors of women with the aim of building a mass women's movement (Sayigh, 1989). At the beginning, the relationship between the new committees and the old charitable societies was tense and competitive. Sayigh (1989), quotes one of the founders of the new women's committees describing this relationship:

> We found the Committee because the older societies did not encourage working women. They only give money and services, don't have development projects, don't try to change consciousness. We go to women, try to involve them in social and political activities. At first the older societies resented us as newcomers. This has been a big problem. But now some of them

help us (p. 167).

This resentment towards the "newcomers" was not only because they had reached out to rural women and approached them in a different way, or because they had crossed class boundaries, but also because they represented a radical social agenda regarding women's power in society which was threatening to the older generation of Palestinian women running the charitable societies. The political views of the four main Palestinian Women's Committees roughly paralleled the four organizations of the PLO's consensus block. But while there may be differences on long range political questions, there is firm unity on the need to mobilize all women in support of the Intifada, the PLO and an independent Palestinian state.

The WWCs had since their inception advocated two separate but interrelated agendas. Their political stand regarding the national question has been an extension of that advocated by their respective "mother" organizations within the PLO. The other agenda, has to do with the role of Palestinian women and their situation both under the Israeli occupation and within the social structure of the Palestinian society. This latter domain, had brought the WWCs into more cooperation and coordination of their activities. According to Hiltermann (1991),

> In 1984, the four committees set up a framework for informal coordination, especially on activities that responded to Israeli repression affecting Palestinian women regardless of affiliation, and that therefore did not require the committees to take separate political stands (p. --).

Thus, for the first time in Palestinian's history, women organizations stressed the need to work for the advancement of women's issues regardless of political differences. Although, at that stage of its development, the Palestinian Women's Movement did not call itself "feminist", a clear indication of addressing gender related issues in the Palestinian society were evident in its agenda. Almost one decade of women organization and grassroots activities before the Intifada, allowed them to enter the new phase of the Palestinian national struggle better organized and determined to achieve both national liberation for their people and social liberation for themselves as women.

The Intifada and Beyond: No go back

When the Intifada erupted in 1987, the hundreds of existing local committees took the lead in organizing protests and in facilitating all basic and essential services to towns, villages and camps. The Palestinian Women's Committees were leaders in this domain. Suddenly, the Intifada has mobilized the whole Palestinian population; women, men, children, older, workers and students. Faced with the new challenges, Palestinian women looked to their own organizations. In doing so, they emerged as one of the Intifada's most active and visible constituencies. Constructed on neighborhood, district, city wide, regional and national levels, the WWCs had for years before the Intifada played a critical role in both the national movement in the occupied territories and the separate but integrally related efforts to involve Palestinian women in social and political life (Sosebee, 1990). Each of the four women's organizations ran kindergartens and child care centers, conducted literacy and skills classes, helped to create and support agricultural and food processing cooperatives, and maintained a wide variety of discussion and support groups, and other activities women in Western countries generally define as "consciousness raising."

Of course during the Intifada, the women have not been involved only in economic and social projects. Their role in the ongoing resistance to the military occupation has become a source of pride and inspiration to Palestinian society as a whole. They organized demonstrations, smuggled wanted youths to safety, on occasion they threw stones at the solders. They mobilized and issued political manifestoes and demands. Women have been arrested, beaten, shot and killed in number unprecedented in Palestinian history. Women have faced special problems under the occupation. Sexual threats and abuse by solders have proliferated. Hundreds of women have miscarried as a

result of tear gas attacks.

While social change is a long and complex process, many were quick to conclude that Palestinian women had achieved much progress in this direction. According to Hammami (1991), "some writers went so far to claim that women had achieved equality through the Intifada" (p. 73). This picture of Palestinian Intifada women activists had led to the conclusion that the Intifada was not only against the Israeli occupation, but also a new way of life the Palestinians were creating. As Hiltermann (1991), comments

> Soon commentators were referring to the Intifada not only as a "shaking off" of the military rule, but also as a social revolution in its own right, in which the younger generation was rebelling against the older one, street activists were challenging the authority of the PLO, and women were casting off the yoke of gender oppression (p.--).

The question of how much social change did the Palestinian women accomplish during the Intifada, and what guarantees they have for their future role after independence in very debatable. Many women activists will agree that not only much of the gains they have made during the early stages of the Intifada are under attack, but also their social achievements from before the Intifada demand protection. The Palestinian Intifada did not only give a momentum to Palestinian women's political participation, but at the same time, the Islamic Resistence Movement (Hamas) took roots in the Gaza Strip and became involved in the national struggle for the first time. Hammami (1991), argues that

> The strategy this movement used to expand its base of support among the general population and make in-roads into the national movement was by trying to "nationalize" elements of its social program, to make them part of nationalist ideology. And the specific means it used to achieve this goal was women (p. 25).

The most obvious instrument of oppression Hamas' had used against Palestinian women was what became widely known as the *Hijab* (or veil) campaign. Women who wear it cover their entire body leaving only their face. To Hanan Ashrawi this is the most visible aspect of women victimization. She told Ms. (1992) that "[it] sums up the way you view a woman: as a sex object, as shameful, so you cover her up; as a commodity, the possession of man, as a secondary member of society" (p. 15). The problem with the *Hijab* from the personal experience of women who are wearing it is when it is imposed on them against their will, and when "it is used as an instrument to impose a wider social-political program that seeks to force them out of political life" (Hammami, 1991 p. 79). Women became conscious of what this dressing code could do to them. As an individual woman "you lose your individual features when you wear [it] - it places you among abstractions" (Ashrawi, 1992 p. 15).

The Palestinian women put direct pressure on, and demanded prompt intervention of the Unified Leadership of the Intifada (UNLU), which included all the Palestinian factions but Hamas. After a year long protest and pressure, the Palestinian women's gains could best be describe as tokenism. The UNLU had finally issued a communiqué in which it condemned the *Hijab* campaign against women (Hammami, 1990).

The religious campaign against Palestinian women is not the only obstacle to their achievements both on the national and social levels. Many Palestinian women activists dwell on the experience of Algerian women. Ask any Palestinian woman activist and she will tell you that Algerian women had fought in the revolution and when Algeria was liberated they were sent back to the kitchen; we are not going to make the same mistake. An activist member of one of the women's committees was quoted by Hiltermann (1991), saying: "The struggle for our rights as workers and as women should start now or we'll end up with another bourgeois state and another kind of regime that will oppress women and the working class. It all has to go side by side" (p. --). Another Palestinian woman activist who represented her committee at the women's conference in Nairobi in 1985, said: "If a woman is going to participate only in the national struggle, she'll have to start at square one after liberation" (Hiltermann, 1991 p.--).

In her discussion of the Palestinian women and their future legal rights, Wing (1994), makes a point of comparing the programs of the three Marxist women

committees with the fourth one affiliated with Fatah. She especially touches on the point of religion,

> The three socialist women's committees (excluding Fatah) have made the abolition of the [Islamic law] *sharia* courts and the institution of civil marriage part of their nominal agenda. Since Fatah may be representative of the vast majority of Palestinians, its failure to endorse these reforms may be ominous. It may signal a willingness to adhere to customary and religious norms for the sake of national development at the expense of women's rights (p. 65).

Being ideologically loose and with no defined social agenda aside from mere nationalism, Fatah had attracted followers from all over the Palestinian political map. Its relationship with the Islamic trend is specially sensitive. Fatah cannot push too far in its confrontation with religious trends in the Palestinian society. This may in part, explain why the UNLU which is dominated by Fatah could not be critical of the *Hijab* campaign against the Palestinian women mentioned earlier.

On December 14, 1990 the Women's Studies Committee of Bisan Center in Jerusalem, held a conference entitled "The Intifada and Some Women's Social Issues." The conference was attended by more than 400 women. The theme of the conference included national and social oppression in the lives of Palestinian women. Most important was the first demand the conferring Palestinian women included in the final resolution of their conference. They write:

> The low level of Palestinian women's participation in decision making (both) on the general political and national level and in the fields inside and outside (of Palestine); a situation which is inappropriate, given the importance of Palestinian women's individual qualities and their distinguished role during the Palestinian struggle (p.24).

This is a clear call for involving Palestinian women in the leadership of the national movement. So far, they have been carrying out decisions made by men leaders rather than being allowed to participate on equal footing in the process of decision making. Hanan Ashrawi appeared to be among the few Palestinian women who made their way through the leadership hierarchies usually dominated by men. In her interview to Ms. (1992), Ashrawi states that being a spokesperson "is also a great victory for women in general, and in particular for Arab and Palestinian women" (p. 14). Despite the fact that critical decisions on behalf of Ashrawi's negotiating team were made by the PLO leadership in Tunis, she still views her assignment to such a role as "a collective actin [of women], not tokenism." When the secret accord of Oslo between the PLO and Israel was finally revealed, to Ashrawi's and her negotiating team's surprise, only a small group of men were involved in the secret negotiations. Both Ashrawi and the majority of her negotiating team, had disappeared from the political map and only those who are closely loyal to the PLO leader are acclaimed and recognized.

Palestinians in Israel

Unlike many Third World minorities living in Western societies, the Palestinians in Israel did not immigrate to the new system; rather, the system was imposed on them. Israel was not able to declare its establishment in 1948 before expelling the majority of the native Palestinian population from their land. Only 160,000 leaderless people managed to remain in their land and subsequently became the unwelcome citizens of Israel who were never included in the state's national goals. Almost overnight, they were transformed from a majority in their own country to a minority who were forced to live, work and study in an alien system (Minns & Hijab, 1990). Under such circumstances, existence and survival have become the main concern for the Palestinians in Israel. Today they comprise almost one million which is about 20% of the total Israeli population.

The Israeli government deals with three conflicting principles that determine its policy towards its Palestinian citizens. These principles are the fact that Israel was established as a "Jewish state", that it sees itself as a Western democracy, and that it has sensitive security concerns (Rouhana, 1989). It is a hypocrisy for Israel to claim itself as

a Jewish state and a democracy at the same time. Rouhana (1989), argues that "a state that is defined as belonging to only one people, when its population is composed of two, cannot offer equal opportunities to all its citizens." Furthermore, the Jewish-Zionist nature of the state of Israel exposes its Palestinian citizens to an ongoing conflict between the civic and national aspects of their collective identity. The recognition of their national identity as Palestinians implies a transformation of Israel into a bi-national rather than a Jewish state, a dilemma which is unthinkable for the Israeli leadership.

During the first decade of Israel's establishment there was no sign of any political organization and leadership which would represent and advocate the interests of the Palestinians under its control. The political awakening of the Palestinians in Israel stems from local developments in Israel as well as in reaction to the evolution of the Palestinian struggle in exile. The first major change on the local level was the rapid numerical growth of the Palestinian community inside Israel. Since the establishment of Israel, the Palestinian population has more than quadrupled, and now it numbers over 800,000. Based on this rapid growth, Touma (1985) concluded more than a decade ago that "the Palestinian Arabs are no longer the demoralized, alienated, broken branches of the Arab national minority of 1948, but a strong, compact people, militant in their struggle on both internal and foreign issues, and proud of their national identity" (p. 76).

One of the main characteristics of their political behavior is that they became an extension of the ideological and political difefrences and coalitions among Palestinians in exile and in the occupied territories (Rouhana, 1989). In fact, the PLO with its different factions has become a reference point to any form of political organization among the Palestinians both in the occupied territories and inside Israel itself.

Two major models have been applied to the study of the collective identity of the Palestinians in Israel (Rouhana, 1987). First, the conflict model assumes that the Palestinian and Israeli sub-identities must be in conflict. This model assumes that the Palestinian and Israeli identities are equally attractive (hence in conflict) ignoring the fact that Israel as a "Jewish state" cannot offer equal partnership and sentimental attachment to its Palestinians citizens. Second, the accommodation model assumes that Palestinization and Israelization are not mutually exclusive and can develop among the Palestinian population at the same time. The Israelization component, is mistakenly applied to the Palestinians' struggle for equality within the Israeli system - the only government which is legally responsible for them. This political struggle for equal rights within the Israeli system should not be mistaken for acceptance of the Israeli identity.

Palestinian women in Israel

Similar to their sisters in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian women in Israel have also been active in the existing male dominated political organizations. Wehenver they organized their own women groups within these organizations, the controversy between the social and political agendas could not be avoided. However, a clear call for feminist agenda has been only a recent development in their political participation. In fact, it was the first time in recent Palestinian history that a group of Palestinian women in Haifa set their own organization called *Al-Fanar: The Palestinian Feminist Organization.* (or the lighthouse) with a clear combination of both national and feminist agendas. *Al-Fanar* included only women members which allowed the organizations to be more confrontational in treating women issues in Palestinian society. At the same time, they also advanced political agenda regarding the national questions. To express the complexity of the oppression in the case of Palestinian women they write in the program of their organization:

> As Palestinians they suffer from oppression and discrimination based on nationality, as women they are dominated by the patriarchal system throughout their lives, and as female workers they are the most deprived sector of the workforse. These forms of oppression do not operate separately, but are intertwined, and clearly influence one another. The liberation of women - as

> persons with a social, personal, gender, and national identity - requires a simultaneous struggle on many fronts, which cannot be fragmented or conducted in separate stages (1992 p.1).

By stressing all aspects of oppression as they are manifested in one group's life conditions, it is evident that Palestinian women are calling for the most comprehensive political and social agenda.

The study

Palestinian students in the Israeli universities come from high schools that, instead of developing their sense of national and cultural identity, are systematically involved in the process of blurring and controlling their collective identity as Palestinians (Mari, 1987; Nakhleh, 1979). While a few Palestinian students receive their national and cultural education in their families or through community organizations, for the majority of them the most intense process of national and political socialization takes place through student activism in the university. The goals of the Palestinian student movement, are political and aim at satisfying the social, cultural and political needs of the general Palestinian student population in the Israeli universities. In other words, Palestinian student activists perceive themselves a dynamic agents working toward political and national awareness among the Palestinian students community. Furthermore, they see themselves as an active segment of the Palestinian national movement as a whole and participate in activities in their home communities as well. This study views the process of student activism through the college years as a developmental and educational process for the involved student activists themselves. In addition to the social and political value the student movement has for the community, the individual student activists themselves undergo a significant process of personal and political development as a result of this experience.

Social identity for the purpose of this study is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981 p. 255). Social identity theory recognizes the existence of two components of the self-concept: personal identity and social identity. Personal identity contains specific individual attributes such as feeling of competence, psychological traits, and personal values. Social identity on the other hand is derived from ones knowledge and feeling about his or her membership in social groups such as national, ethnic, class, gender, etc. (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

There are 6000 Palestinian students in 5 major Israeli universities which constitutes about 5.7% of the total student population. The Hebrew and Haifa Universities each accounts for about 35% of the total Palestinian students. The Haifa's Institute of Technology (Technion), Tel-Aviv and Ben-Gurion Universities each has 10% of the total Palestinian student population. In each university there are usually 2 student activists groups that compete over the Arab Student Committee (ASC) leadership in annual elections held in December of each academic year. Palestinian student women constitute about 30% of the total Palestinian student population.

The study utilizes a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative research designs. A qualitative pilot study using personal in-depth interviews with a small sample of student activist (5 female and 12 male) was conducted in the summer of 1996. The second phase of the study included personal interviews with another purposefully selected sample of highly commited student activists (6 female and 13 male), and an administrations of an Instrument Package to representative samples of student activists and non-activists.

The aim of the study was to explore two broad research questions: First, is there a significant difference between Palestinian student activists and non- activists and between men and women in terms of collective identity, collective self-esteem, relative deprivation, attitudes towards the Jewish majority, attitudes towards feminism, social

competence, locus of control and global self-esteem? Second, which of the variables mentioned in the first question in addition to some demographic variables predict student activism?

Initial finding

A group of themes and categories dominant among student activists have emerged from the initial analysis of the qualitative data gathered in the interviews. Two of the major themes which are relevant to our discussion of gender and national identity development will be elaborated. The quantitative findings of the larger study will not be reported here.

1. Collective Identity

Collective identity as Palestinians was strongly expressed as more important than personal identities as individuals and appeared to be the overriding theme that dominated most of the students concerns. It could be viewed as the larger umbrella which encompasses the rest of the emerging themes in a more meaningful way. Collective identity was perceived by the students as both the cause of their involvement in activism and as something that is constructed by the experience of activism itself. There was a strong sense of political awareness and ideological commitment to the Palestinian question at large and to the specific situation of the Palestinian national minority in Israel. Participants attributed their personal mobilization and activism to their ideological and political commitment to the Palestinian dilemma and to their sense of obligation to serve their community.

Ashraf, an education student and active member of the ASC at the University of Haifa explains how he became politically involved:

> A person who wants to be involved in politics must have no materialistic incentives or expectations from that. One should know that one must give material... I was feeling that I was a nationalist person and I wanted something to protect and maintain my Arab identity. These are the only two points.

In his political analysis of the situation of the Palestinian students in the Israeli universities, Jamil draws a picture parallel to the political status of the Palestinians in Israel as a whole:

> I see two levels, we have the micro and macro. What we are doing is we are dealing with the micro level. We have a small model that represents the situation of the Arab national minority in Israel. This is how I view the system-the university as a system. We are a national minority in the university which is a Jewish system with its Jewish interests, goals and slogans. The way we are treated by the university is based on our minority status. The concept "minority students" with a sectarian negative connotation, is identical to the way the system treats the Arab masses. Therefore, we need to get organized. We have to be united as a minority group, which can be done through the ASC.

The main reason Palestinian student activists organize themselves in different groups instead of only one is the political diversity among them. While all groups share similar views regarding the day-to-day student activities, they each represents a clear and distinct political agenda regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at large. During the elections to the ASC the main debate focuses on their respective political programs. To illustrate this point, it is sufficient to cite the subtitles of the program distributed by the "Front for Nationalistic Student Action" at the University of Haifa during the Palestinian student elections in 1989/90:

> The international arena following the berustrika ... the Palestinian dilemma--historical background ... the Intifada and political solutions ... Palestinian independence ... the political solution ... our political stands ... the Zionist movement ... the Arab-Zionist conflict ... the present era ... balance of powers ... the world political order ... our struggle among the masses ... our struggle among the students ... students issues.

The small face-to-face groups of student activists are part of larger community based political organizations. Political commitment and group membership were expressed as another, yet more personal level of collective identification.

Eris has this to say about the level ideological commitment and sacrifice to the cause among members of her political group:

> I can't see anybody who joined Abna al-Balad for personal gains. Even if we talk about changes within 50-60 years that may benefit the masses. No one was that naive to think that the situation will change in 5-6 years so they themselves can benefit from that... People who join Abna al-Balad know that they will never get jobs. You go to the university just to get a degree to hang it on your wall. If you are Abna Balad you go through so many police interrogations, lots of troubles. they dismiss you from the university, lots of sacrifice. I worked with lots people who went to jail and got beaten by the police. Every single person in Abna al-Balad joined based on principles and convection. I am positive about that because this involves lots of sacrifice.

2. <u>Gender Issues and Identity</u>

Women student activists expressed awareness and need to address women's issues as part of the political-social agenda of their student organizations, more so than their male comrades. Mobilizing Palestinian women for the national struggle, and meanwhile ignoring the socio-cultural constrains that bind them to limited kinds of actions and roles was perceived as a political hypocrisy. Being women in a patriarchal society which is also suffering from national oppression as a whole, Palestinian women student activists find themselves advocating both nationalist and feminist agendas at the same time.

The contradiction between revolutionary political consciousness and reactionary social-gender consciousness demonstrated by many Palestinian male activists is still the major dilemma facing Palestinian women activists (Abdo, 1991). Eris, was very articulate in describing the situation of the women activists in her organization:

> I will show you something that I wrote about the situation of the women in the movement. At the University of Haifa almost half of the activists are women. Outside the university the portion of women activists drops to 1/10. In a large demonstration, half the participants are women. In a summer camp half the participants are women. They spend a whole week on the beach and there is no problem with that... In a party half the audience are women. In the secretariat of the movement there are no women at all. There is only one. Women don't get to be in the leadership of the movement... When I ask these women why don't they come to the meeting, they say "we are not allowed to stay out late." Now, they allow them to go to all the social functions but when it comes to political meeting where they might be involved in leadership activities they stay at home.

Samira, has just graduated with a law degree from the University of Haifa and began working on her Masters degree in sociology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She was in Haifa, her hometown, during the summer to work for her party's campaign in the Knesset elections. She illustrates her frustration about being used as a token for women representation and the party's secretariat.

> I have never felt inferior among other student activists... I began feeling strange when we started to establish al-Tajamu in the community two years ago and I was included as a woman ... I started going to the meetings. Then I started to feeling strange for two reasons. First, because they were all older people and second, I was there as a woman not because I was qualified to be there. It is kind of a ugly feeling to feel that you are there not for what you are and what you know...At some point another woman joined the secretariat and we became two women... I had the feeling that I had to work harder to prove myself.

Lina was raised in a politically active family. She defines herself as a feminist and works both in political groups with men and in all women organizations. She has this to say about the relationship between her gender and national identities:

> I feel very proud of my Arab identity, but at the same time my Arab culture oppresses me as a woman...I don't see culture as something static, we can take what is good and leave what is not working for us.

Asked if she sees any contradiction among Palestinian male activist between their political attitudes and attitudes toward women, she was not even surprised that they

themselves don't see the contradiction. »

> Palestinian male activists believe it is their role to maintain our national and cultural identity ncluding traditions. They do not see that many of these traditions were there to oppress women at the first place. I don't think that many Palestinian male activists are aware of this contradiction.

Conclusion

Maintaining that issues of gender and national identity development in the Palestinian National Movement are interrelated, the contribution of this project is twofold. First, to understand the process by which Palestinian young women develop their national and gender identities during student activism and keep a dialectical balance between the two. Second, by asserting the dual oppression based on their gender and nationality, Palestinian women are making the most rigorous demand for a new society where Palestinians and Jews, men and women all can live in peace and equality. Being an ally to their voice and help bringing it to the discussion is the ultimate goal of this project.

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